

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A vehicular control device for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission efficiency is variable, comprising:

an operating-mode control controller that controls an operating mode for the power source;

a neutral control performance controller that controls, for the automatic transmission, performance of neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

a neutral control performance prohibition controller that controls prohibition of performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the basis of a predetermined condition regarding operating-mode control performed for the power source,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,

wherein cooperative control for adjusting an increase or decrease in output of the engine in accordance with a load required for the driving wheels in the vehicle is performed in the operating-mode control controller, and the predetermined condition regarding the operating-mode control is determined on the basis of detection of a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control during performance thereof,

and wherein the factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control is deterioration in performance of an engine valve open-close timing change mechanism that adjusts timings for opening or closing engine valves for actuating the engine.

Claim 2 (Original): The vehicular control device according to claim 1, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by
adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.

Claims 3-10 (Cancelled).

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): ~~The vehicular control device according to claim 4, A~~
vehicular control device for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is
transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission
efficiency is variable, comprising:

an operating-mode control controller that controls an operating mode for the power
source;

a neutral control performance controller that controls, for the automatic transmission,
performance of neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the
transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a
running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the
driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

a neutral control performance prohibition controller that controls prohibition of
performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the basis of a
predetermined condition regarding operating-mode control performed for the power source,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,

wherein cooperative control for adjusting an increase or decrease in output of the
engine in accordance with a load required for the driving wheels in the vehicle is performed
in the operating-mode control controller, and the predetermined condition regarding the

operating-mode control is determined on the basis of detection of a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control during performance thereof,

and wherein the neutral control performance prohibition controller abstains from prohibiting performance of the neutral control if a factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance through performance of the neutral control has not been detected even in the case where a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control has been detected.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): A vehicular control device for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission efficiency is variable, comprising:

an operating-mode control controller that controls an operating mode for the power source;

a neutral control performance controller that controls, for the automatic transmission, performance of neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

a neutral control performance prohibition controller that prohibits performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the condition that a factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance through performance of the neutral control be detected,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,

and wherein the factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance is determined on the basis of at least one of a bed temperature of a catalyst disposed in an

exhaust passage of the internal combustion engine so as to purify exhaust gas flowing through the exhaust passage and a temperature of coolant for cooling the engine.

Claim 13 (Original): The vehicular control device according to claim 12, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.

Claims 14-15 (Cancelled).

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A vehicular control method for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission efficiency is variable, comprising the steps of:

controlling an operating mode for the power source;

controlling a performance of a neutral control, for the automatic transmission, the neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

controlling a prohibition of performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the basis of a predetermined condition regarding operating-mode control performed for the power source,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,

wherein cooperative control for adjusting an increase or decrease in output of the internal combustion engine in accordance with a load required for the driving wheels in the

vehicle is performed in the step of controlling an operating mode, and the predetermined condition regarding the operating-mode control is determined on the basis of detection of a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control during performance thereof,

and wherein the factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control is a deterioration in performance of an engine valve open-close timing change mechanism that adjusts timings for opening or closing engine valves for actuating the engine.

Claim 17 (Original): The vehicular control method according to claim 16, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.

Claims 18-25 (Canceled).

Claim 26 (Currently Amended): ~~The vehicular control method according to claim 19,~~
A vehicular control method for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission efficiency is variable, comprising the steps of:
controlling an operating mode for the power source;
controlling a performance of a neutral control, for the automatic transmission, the neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

controlling a prohibition of performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the basis of a predetermined condition regarding operating-mode control performed for the power source,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,

wherein cooperative control for adjusting an increase or decrease in output of the internal combustion engine in accordance with a load required for the driving wheels in the vehicle is performed in the step of controlling an operating mode, and the predetermined condition regarding the operating-mode control is determined on the basis of detection of a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control during performance thereof,

and wherein prohibition of performance of the neutral control is abstained from in the step of controlling prohibition of performance of the neutral control, if a factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance through performance of the neutral control has not been detected even in the case where a factor threatening to hinder performance of the cooperative control has been detected.

Claim 27 (Currently Amended): A vehicular control method for a vehicle in which a driving force generated by a power source is transmitted to driving wheels via an automatic transmission whose power transmission efficiency is variable, comprising the steps of:

controlling an operating mode for the power source;

controlling a performance of a neutral control, for the automatic transmission, neutral control for rendering an input frictional engagement element of the transmission in a released or slipping state when the vehicle is stopped while being in a running range in which a driving force delivered from the power source is transmitted to the driving wheels by the automatic transmission; and

controlling a prohibition of performance of the neutral control for the automatic transmission on the condition that a factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance through performance of the neutral control be detected,

wherein the power source is an internal combustion engine,
and wherein the factor threatening to cause a deterioration in vehicular performance is
determined on the basis of at least one of a bed temperature of a catalyst disposed in an
exhaust passage of the internal combustion engine so as to purify exhaust gas flowing
through the exhaust passage and a temperature of coolant for cooling the engine.

Claim 28 (Original): The vehicular control method according to claim 27, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by
adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.

Claims 29-30 (Cancelled).

Claim 31 (New): The vehicular control device according to claim 11, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by
adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.

Claim 32 (New): The vehicular control method according to claim 26, wherein:
the automatic transmission is provided with a fluid clutch; and
a power transmission efficiency of the automatic transmission can be changed by
adjusting an amount of fluid to be contained in the fluid clutch.